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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000427

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SUBJECT: GENDARMERIE SENT TO PROTECT GAS STATIONS FROM
UNIFORMED BANDITS

¶1. (U) Summary: Gas stations throughout Guinea are increasingly the targets of armed attacks by uniformed bandits. As a result, station managers announced that they would be limiting their operation to the daylight hours. In other news, the association of gasoline station attendants went on strike for twenty-four hours to demand higher salaries, health benefits, and personal security protection. END SUMMARY.

UNIFORMED MEN RESPONSIBLE FOR ROBBERIES

¶2. (U). According to several gas station managers and pompistes (gas station attendants), gas stations have increasingly become the targets of armed robbery by rogue elements of the military since the December 2008 coup d'etat. Embassy RSO investigators have received five confirmed reports of armed robberies of gas stations in Guinea since April 26th alone, though industry workers estimate that many more have gone unreported.

¶3. (U) In each reported case, men in military uniform were responsible for stealing large amounts of money. Several pompistes and managers further claimed that these uniformed bandits stole gas, though no official reports have reflected this. Many of the robberies included violence against pompistes in the form of gunshot or stab wounds, including one homicide involving a worker at a Total station in Kindia.

¶4. (U) On July 9, gas stations country-wide began closing their doors at dusk in order to prevent night robberies. The gas workers, association demanded that the Ministry of Commerce (MOC), under which gas station operation falls, provide security for each station in the country in order to reopen the facilities for normal operating hours. Though the MOC allegedly resisted at first, they eventually agreed to hold a meeting to discuss security matters on July 14 at the Palais du People. By July 17, most gas stations received their requested security force. The agreement allegedly stipulated that three gendarmes guard gas stations from 6pm until closing. Several Conakry pompistes and managers said that the security situation has improved significantly since the gendarmes appeared at the stations, though they have concerns about the GOG's commitment to retaining the forces in the long-term.

A PERFECT DAY FOR A STRIKE

¶5. (U) In related news, the pompiste association went on strike on July 19. The one-day strike was meant to bring about changes in their security, salary, and benefits situation. Several pompistes told EconOff that their

salaries, at around \$53 USD per month, were insufficient to make ends meet at home. They also mentioned that their lack of employee benefits coupled with their weak salaries do not compensate sufficiently for the danger that they face by working at night. Mr. Diallo, a pompiste at a Total station in Conakry, said that the government has little control over the security situation, putting workers at risk. A gas station manager, on the other hand, said that the pompiste strike has little to do with the security situation and that he wasn't even aware that the strike was coming until he showed up at work and there were no pompistes to operate the pumps.

¶16. (U) Though Guinean news outlets report that some gas stations remain closed at certain hours of the day, the strike seems to be over for the time being. Several pompistes said that none of their demands have yet been met, but they hope that they can continue to negotiate while working. One worker said, "Times are hard in Guinea. Too hard. We have to work."

¶17. (SBU) COMMENT: The fact that these attacks were committed by men in uniform seems to indicate further evidence of a general breakdown of order and discipline within the Guinean army. The attacks also perpetuate civilian distrust of the military. This trend of robbery could be an indication that soldiers are capitalizing on their current power, as they realize that their position under the CNDD may be short-lived. The last time that Guinea saw such brazen attacks on gas stations by uniformed officials was immediately before the 2007 mutiny and the 2009 coup d'etat. The pompiste strike, on the other hand, is rooted in demands

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for pay increases more than concerns over security.
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